



MEXICAN CAVALLEROS at the St. Paul Festival of Nations.



## ST. PAUL'S FESTIVAL OF NATIONS

CONSTANCE FISHER

The Festival of Nations, held in St. Paul, Minnesota, from 4-24 through 4-27-47, is the most colorful and fascinating exhibition the city puts on, (excepting the Winter Carnival and the various Ice shows, which are on a smaller scale in content.) Truly, St. Paul is a city of pa-geantry. The history of the Festivals is astounding and should be studied in order to realize just what amazing strides have occurred during the 15 years they have been presented. The first one was in 1932, with 15 nationality groups participating, and with 3,500 in attendance. The locale was in the YWCA auditorium and lobby. This year's Festival was participated in by 8,000 individuals, with 300 standing committees, 39 nationality groups, and held in the Arena of the Public Auditorium. At least 26,000 or more viewed it during its four days "run"!

But I want to hurry to the emotional side of it, or if you'd rather have it, the real spirit of the Festival. This was my third Festival and I went as often as possible, knowing that I would really miss something very valuable with each day or performance not attended. At best I could attend only three evenings and one afternoon. Consequently I will not be able to give an eye-account of all the programs.

Upon entering the auditorium, there were exhibition and program booths set up in the foyer, and they extended around the entire length of the arena on both sides. Back-to-back with these (facing the center of the arena) were the market booths of the many nationalities, brightly painted and set apart by flowers common to their background, and full of tempting foods of all sorts. The aroma of shish kibob (lamb on skewers), hot potato salad, coffee, fried chicken, Hungarian goulash, Italian spaghetti, Japanese shrimp fritters, Mexican hot tamales, Russian holubtsi (hamburger and rice wrapped in cabbage leaf), Syrian Yakoknee (green beans with lamb and tomatoes),

and many other such things, permeated the air. And the pastries were a feast to the eyes. If man is what he eats, then thousands of us were for four days the greatest mixture of nations and things ever known to the world, for a prevailing idea was to sample as much of as many different foods as possible! From the moment of entry into the foyer you viewed all sorts of native dress—I will not say costumes, for the people who wore them (in the main) had come or were descended from the countries they represented, owned them, and had even helped make them or had them made by their own families. Every possible color and hue were used, and skirts and bodices and blouses with either no embellishments at all, a few, or with gorgeous embroideries or sequins, were everywhere. The world was on the march—was about its business of peddling friendship and fellowship to every corner. From the tiniest little Evzone and the Muses of Greece to the tallest kilted Scotsman in the arena and the chalutzim and refugees of Palestine, they were there. Even far away Burma had one emissary, a student, as did Wales and Belgium, in their war brides. And there were crooked sticks and saris, burnous' and sabots, windmills and tulip carts, the Taj Mahal and a Swiss chalet, the Covered Wagon and a rickshaw, serapes and guitars, accordions and castanets and fifty year old ebony bones, and the huge Scandinavian bon-fire (birch logs built up to a pyramid, topped by a witch). There were sidewalk cafes, umbrellas, and Hawaiian lei of carnations flown from Hawaii especially for the Festival. While the minstrels were strolling about the Market Square, the Ukraniens were busy telling the story of and actually painting their eggs, and the Chinese were autographing hand-painted cards of silk, in their native language. A Russian mill was busy grinding away (by hand power) while a recording of Russian music was being played behind the scene. At the same time the attendant at the Jewish booth would be explaining the use and symbolism of the religious objects on display, and the Negroes would be explaining some lovely busts or heads of terra cotta in their booth. Not too far away there would come the sound of beating drums in the Indian booth while the two small girls there peeped out from the back and turned on their contagious smiles. At the same time, Iceland would be pointing to the beautiful blankets, sweaters, etc., made from the wool of its sheep, the natural colors being preserved and the work all done by hand. And you could not proceed far without seeing the very old German music box in the



DUTCH LASSIES in the Netherland section of the St. Paul, Minn., Festival of Nations



CROATIANS in their gay and richly embroidered skirts and aprons posing in front of their booth at the St. Paul Festival of Nations.

form of a piano on a platform, with a woman sitting with her hands on the key board. When the box was wound her hands would play the music. Not the least of the attractions was the ambidexterous artist with the bones, gathering large crowds by his and his accompanist's rhythm. All of this and hundred times more, was going on during the dinner hour and after the formal programs were presented. This informality in itself was remarkable and fascinating, but there had to be a more formal phase too, in order to present in organized fashion the many cultural contributions to America.

And so, each program began with a procession of representatives of the participating nationalities and groups. First came the President of the International Institute (mother of the Festival), himself a Greek. On his arm was the general Chairman, and in quick procession, others who were in charge of the entire project. The President and Chairman remained standing at the opposite end of the Market Square from the Town Hall to recognize and welcome all these nations of the world into the melting pot that is America. These nations presented in this parade war brides, (Welsh and Belgian), wedding parties, (Chinese and Romanian), Jenny Lind, Wm. Tell and his son, shamrocks and harps, the banner of the White Eagle of Poland, the music of Franz Schubert, "The Emperor's New Clothes" (Hans Christian Andersen), and many, many other gifts. Leading the entire parade was a group of Sioux Indians, resplendent in war bonnets and buckskins. Most of the groups were composed not only of the older and young adults, but also of the tiny ones, the new generation which is the hope of the future.

Any attempt to describe or enumerate all the artistry, skill, beauty, nimbleness, and agility and grace of the individual groups as they danced, tumbled, boxed, defended, and sang, is not possible. But I shall point out some to give an idea. Many things of beauty in the way of the dance were missed by me the first evening, such as the Mazurka and Krakowiak of Poland, Lovely Hula Hands and E Lilue (an Old-fashioned Hula, written for Queen

Liliuokalni), the Ao Zora (Blue Syies, done with twirling silk parasols) and Hanami Odori, (Flower Festival Dance) of Japan, much yodeling and dancing by the Swiss, the Ukrainian Folk Ballet (including a professional, the universal circle dance of all provinces, a "dance of the wind over the wheat fields for girls," and others), and the Viennese Waltz. The Student's program included various folk dances and songs, American square dances, relays, tumbling, singing, and the Virginia Reel. Then came Friday, with the Sword Dance and Subkie (general pattern of a circle dance, but with more individual freedom for expression) by the Syrians. Never was a sword twirled with more vigor, or such glee put into a dance! The Negroes presented a choir, flanked by a verse speaking group, which formed the background for a modern dance group, which told the story of the Negro symbolically and which also made you feel the rhythm, melody, and intensity of the singing and dancing of the Spirituals. This was very well received by the audience and highly commended by many. As the French presented the stately Minuet de La Reine (couple dance) you had the feeling of seeing come to life before your eyes lovely and fragile old China figures. The group did several things but when they came to do the Can-Can and Madelon, the whole audience broke into a spontaneous clapping of the rhythms. The Tumbling Squad of the U. of M. completely covered itself with glory as it gave a superb exhibition of Trampoline, each man a whole show in himself. The Samba was never danced with such enthusiasm and spirit (especially by one couple) as it was done by the students of the Latin-American group. The next group to come into its own was the Twin City Scandinavian Folk Dancers—Norwegian, Swedish, Danish. Their dances were done around the huge bon-fire, and among others, included Sex Mand's Reel, Daldans, and Vals fra Hadsund. The most fascinating point in the whole performance came when three dances, (one of each group) were done simultaneously to the same melody.

On Saturday evening we had in verity "the gathering of the Clan," for the Campbells and the Gordons and the McDonalds were all there in full array, kilts, swords, bagpipes and all! The Sword Dance was excellently done, as was also the Highland Schottische. Chinese Shadow Boxing was portrayed next (done by a Chinese student), revealing the very intricate patterns of hand, body and leg movements, yet giving the feeling of a complete fluidity of movement. Then came the Irish, with their jigs and reels, and a fiddler all their own. The ensemble work was most acceptable, but I think the audience will never be able to forget the leader of the group, who must have been born dancing! He went through all the group dancing, did a jig that almost defied the eyes to follow the feet, and then began all over again in the next group dance! His energy, agility, and precision, as well as his sense of rhythm would put many a younger person to utter shame. Following the Irish came the Jews, portraying through dance and song the festival of the harvest (Shovous) in modern Palestine. The processional to the temple by young and old, farmers and workers, in biblical garb, carrying baskets of the first fruits was beautiful to watch as they began dancing to the traditional music (the Bikkurim) of this festival. The refugees came and all joined in dancing a horra, and singing joyously. The Russians then gave to us a balalaika orchestra and dancing. Great acclaim came from the audience to a young man with a great sense of showmanship and a pleasing personality, who went into an exhibition dance of White Russian origin. His performance was exciting and brilliant, and I kept wondering if he would have a single breath left when he finished!

Very rarely do we of the Occident have a chance to